

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method of predicting the behavior of a current user of an interactive
5 service, comprising the steps of:

identifying each activity in which the current user participates while
engaged with the interactive service, and conditions surrounding each
such activity;

10 accessing a first collection of data that reflects (i) cumulative activities in
which other users have participated, (ii) conditions surrounding such
other users' cumulative activities, and (iii) patterns of behavior exhibited
by such other users through their participation in such cumulative
activities;

15 comparing (i) the current user's identified activities and surrounding
conditions and (ii) the other users' cumulative activities and surrounding
conditions, to identify similarities therebetween; and

20 attributing to the current user a pattern of future behavior based on such
similarities and on the other users' patterns of behavior.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of identifying the conditions
surrounding each of the current user's activities includes determining the
25 amount of time that the current user participates in each activity.

3. The method of Claim 2, wherein the first collection of data includes
data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each

other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the other users are unrelated individual persons.

7. The method of Claim 1, wherein the other users are members of a group and the current user is identifiable as a potential member of that group.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:

periodically updating the first collection of data to reflect the other users' ongoing participation in additional activities.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the step of periodically updating occurs in real time, during the current user's engagement with the interactive service.

11. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:

accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of activities
that are available via the interactive service and (ii) information about
each activity within such plurality of available activities that distinguishes
it from the other activities within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing includes selecting one or more activities,
from the plurality of available activities, in which the current user is most
likely to participate during the engagement with the interactive service.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein the interactive service is accessed
through the Internet, the current user's activities and the other users' activities
comprise visits to Internet web sites, and the first collection of data includes data
reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) the types of Internet web sites
that each other user has visited, (iii) the content of each type of Internet web site
visited by each other user, and (iv) the amount of time spent at each type of
Internet web site by each other user.

13. The method of Claim 1, wherein the interactive service is accessed
through a television system capable of capturing information on the user's
television-watching-related activities.

14. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of:

periodically updating the first collection of data to reflect the other users'
visits to additional Internet web sites.

15. The method of Claim 14, wherein the step of periodically updating occurs in real time, during the current user's engagement with the service.

16. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of:

accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of types of Internet web sites that are available for the current user to visit and (ii) information about each type of web site within such plurality that distinguishes it from the other types of web sites within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing includes selecting one or more types of web sites, from the plurality of types of web sites, which the current user is most likely to visit during the engagement with the service.

17. A method of predicting the behavior of a user of an interactive service, during a particular period of engagement with the interactive service, comprising the steps of:

identifying activities in which the user participates during the period of engagement, and conditions surrounding each such activity;

identifying the activities of multiple other contemporaneous users of the interactive service during the same period of engagement, and conditions surrounding such activities;

maintaining a first collection of data that includes data reflecting both the user's and the other contemporaneous users' cumulative activities identified during the period of engagement, and conditions surrounding such cumulative activities;

determining, from such first collection of data, patterns of behavior exhibited by such user's and the other contemporaneous users' participation in activities during the period of engagement;

5 incorporating, into the first collection of data, data reflecting such determined patterns of behavior;

comparing (i) the user's present activities and surrounding conditions and (ii) the cumulative activities and surrounding conditions as reflected in such first collection of data, to identify similarities therebetween;

10 attributing to the user a pattern of future behavior based on such similarities and on the previously determined patterns of behavior.

18. The method of Claim 17, further comprising the step of:

15 continually updating the first collection of data, to reflect (i) the user's and the other contemporaneous users' participation in additional activities and (ii) the determination of new patterns of behavior based on such participation in additional activities; and

20 wherein the steps of comparing and attributing are performed, at any given point in time, in conjunction with the updated first collection of data.

25 19. The method of Claim 18, further comprising the step of:

accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of activities that are available via the interactive service and (ii) information about

each activity within such plurality of available activities that distinguishes it from the other activities within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing includes selecting one or more activities, from the plurality of available activities, in which the user is most likely to participate during the period of engagement with the interactive service.

20. The method of Claim 18, wherein the interactive service is accessed through the Internet, the user's and other contemporaneous users' activities comprise visits to Internet web sites, and the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the types of Internet web sites that the user and the other contemporaneous users have visited, (ii) the content of each type of Internet web site visited, and (iii) the amount of time spent at each type of Internet web site visited.

21. The method of Claim 20, further comprising the step of:

accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of types of Internet web sites that are available for the user to visit and (ii) information about each type of web site within such plurality that distinguishes it from the other types of web sites within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing includes selecting one or more types of web sites, from the plurality of types of web sites, which the current user is most likely to visit during the engagement with the service.

22. A method of delivering targeted informational content to a current user of an interactive service, comprising the steps of:

identifying each activity in which the current user participates while engaged with the interactive service, and conditions surrounding each such activity;

5 accessing a first collection of data that reflects (i) cumulative activities in which other users have participated, (ii) conditions surrounding such other users' cumulative activities, and (iii) preferences exhibited by such other users through their participation in such cumulative activities;

10 comparing (i) the current user's identified activities and surrounding conditions and (ii) the other users' cumulative activities and surrounding conditions, to identify similarities therebetween;

15 attributing to the current user a preference profile based on such similarities and on the other users' preferences; and

generating an ordered list of informational content to be selectively delivered to the current user based on the preference profile.

20 23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the step of identifying the conditions surrounding each of the current user's activities includes determining the amount of time that the current user participates in each activity.

25 24. The method of Claim 22, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

25. The method of Claim 24, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

26. The method of Claim 22, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

27. The method of Claim 22, wherein the other users are unrelated individual persons.

28. The method of Claim 22, wherein the other users are members of a group and the current user is identifiable as a potential member of that group.

29. The method of Claim 22, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

30. The method of Claim 22, further comprising the step of:

periodically updating the first collection of data to reflect the other users' ongoing participation in additional activities.

31. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of periodically updating occurs in real time, during the current user's engagement with the interactive service.

32. The method of Claim 22, further comprising the step of:

accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of activities that are available via the interactive service and (ii) information about each activity within such plurality of available activities that distinguishes it from the other activities within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing a preference profile is based in part on those activities, from the plurality of available activities, in which the current user is most likely to participate during the engagement with the interactive service.

33. The method of Claim 22, wherein the interactive service is accessed through the Internet, the current user's activities and the other users' activities comprise visits to Internet web sites, and the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) the types of Internet web sites that each other user has visited, (iii) the content of each type of Internet web site visited by each other user, and (iv) the amount of time spent at each type of Internet web site by each other user.

34. The method of Claim 22, wherein the interactive service is accessed through a television system capable of capturing information on the user's television-watching-related activities.

35. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon instructions for predicting the behavior of a current user of an interactive service which, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to perform the steps of:

identifying each activity in which the current user participates while engaged with the interactive service, and conditions surrounding each such activity;

accessing a first collection of data that reflects (i) cumulative activities in which other users have participated, (ii) conditions surrounding such other users' cumulative activities, and (iii) patterns of behavior exhibited by such other users through their participation in such cumulative activities;

comparing (i) the current user's identified activities and surrounding conditions and (ii) the other users' cumulative activities and surrounding conditions, to identify similarities therebetween; and

attributing to the current user a pattern of future behavior based on such similarities and on the other users' patterns of behavior.

36. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, wherein the instruction that causes the processor to perform the step of identifying the conditions surrounding each of the current user's activities causes the processor to perform the step of determining the amount of time that the current user participates in each activity.

37. The computer-readable medium of Claim 36, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

38. The computer-readable medium of Claim 37, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

39. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

5 40. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

10 41. The computer-readable medium of Claim 1, having stored thereon further instructions which, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to perform the step of:

15 periodically updating the first collection of data to reflect the other users' ongoing participation in additional activities.

20 42. The computer-readable medium of Claim 41, wherein the instructions that cause the processor to perform the step of periodically updating cause it to do so in real time, during the current user's engagement with the interactive service.

25 43. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, having stored thereon further instructions which, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to perform the step of:

 accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of activities that are available via the interactive service and (ii) information about each activity within such plurality of available activities that distinguishes it from the other activities within such plurality; and

wherein the step of attributing includes selecting one or more activities, from the plurality of available activities, in which the current user is most likely to participate during the engagement with the interactive service.

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44. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, wherein the interactive service is accessed through the Internet, the current user's activities and the other users' activities comprise visits to Internet web sites, and the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) the types of Internet web sites that each other user has visited, (iii) the content of each type of Internet web site visited by each other user, and (iv) the amount of time spent at each type of Internet web site by each other user.

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45. The computer-readable medium of Claim 35, wherein the interactive service is accessed through a television system capable of capturing information on the user's television-watching-related activities.

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46. Apparatus for predicting the behavior of a current user of an interactive service, comprising:

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means for identifying each activity in which the current user participates while engaged with the interactive service, and conditions surrounding each such activity;

means for accessing a first collection of data that reflects (i) cumulative activities in which other users have participated, (ii) conditions surrounding such other users' cumulative activities, and (iii) patterns of behavior exhibited by such other users through their participation in such cumulative activities;

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means for comparing (i) the current user's identified activities and surrounding conditions and (ii) the other users' cumulative activities and surrounding conditions, to identify similarities therebetween; and

5 means for attributing to the current user a pattern of future behavior based on such similarities and on the other users' patterns of behavior.

10 47. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the means of identifying the conditions surrounding each of the current user's activities includes means for determining the amount of time that the current user participates in each activity.

15 48. The apparatus of Claim 47, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

20 49. The apparatus of Claim 48, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

50. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the first collection of data is based on the other users' activities while engaged with the interactive service.

25 51. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the other users are unrelated individual persons.

52. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the other users are members of a group and the current user is identifiable as a potential member of that group.

53. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the first collection of data includes data reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) each activity in which each other user has participated and (iii) the amount of time that each other user participated in each activity.

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54. The apparatus of Claim 46, further comprising:

means for periodically updating the first collection of data to reflect the other users' ongoing participation in additional activities.

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55. The apparatus of Claim 54, wherein the means for periodically updating operates in real time, during the current user's engagement with the interactive service.

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56. The apparatus of Claim 46, further comprising:

means for accessing a second collection of data that reflects (i) a plurality of activities that are available via the interactive service and (ii) information about each activity within such plurality of available activities that distinguishes it from the other activities within such plurality; and

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wherein the means for attributing includes means for selecting one or more activities, from the plurality of available activities, in which the current user is most likely to participate during the engagement with the interactive service.

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57. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the interactive service is accessed through the Internet, the current user's activities and the other users' activities comprise visits to Internet web sites, and the first collection of data includes data

reflecting (i) the identity of each other user, (ii) the types of Internet web sites that each other user has visited, (iii) the content of each type of Internet web site visited by each other user, and (iv) the amount of time spent at each type of Internet web site by each other user.

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58. The apparatus of Claim 46, wherein the interactive service is accessed through a television system capable of capturing information on the user's television-watching-related activities.